

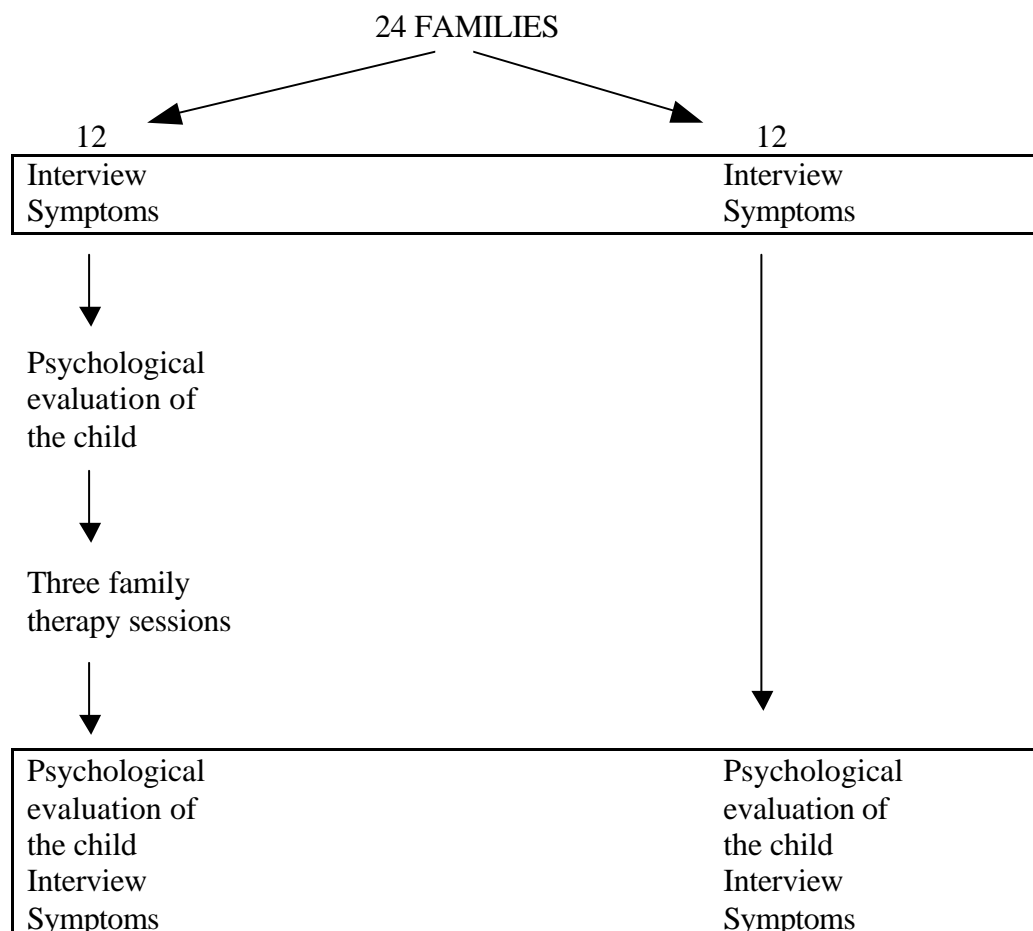
Psychological Evaluation of Refugee Children in Relation to War Experiences and Social Network

Background

An increasing number of refugee families with children have come to Sweden during the last decade. Earlier research has shown that children experiencing war may have different symptoms like aggressiveness, regression, sleeping disturbances and psychosomatic symptoms, for example headache and stomach-ache. Some children react by becoming silent or resigned.

The main purpose of this study is to achieve a deeper knowledge of children of refugee families and evaluate the efficiency of brief family therapy. In the project 24 families from Bosnia and Herzegovina take part. They have been randomly assigned to two groups; 12 families receive three family therapy sessions while the other 12 families serves as a comparison group. One criterion is that there is a child 5-12 years old in the family.

Overview of the project:



Methods

All 24 families are interviewed about background factors and present situation both at the beginning and about six months later. The symptoms of one of the children (5-12 years) are evaluated according to a symptom scale developed by Cederblad/Höök using a structured interview with the parents. Psychological projective diagnostics are done with children in one group. One method is the "World Technique" or the Erica method, where 360 miniature toys from different categories like soldiers, civilians, guns, trains, wild and domestic animals, trees and fences are used. The children are shown the toys and get the task to build whatever they want in a sandbox. Other psychological measures are Machover, CAT and an interview with the child assessing symptoms of posttraumatic stress. The method used is a revised version of DICA-R-A. The same group of children go through three family therapy sessions together with their families including sisters and brothers. Both in the diagnostics and family therapy sessions an interpreter is used. The non-intervention group is offered family therapy at the follow-up interview.

Themes in the family therapy sessions are the present situation, former life situation before the war, the flight to Sweden from the point of view of each family member, role changes, network and thoughts of the future.

Three different cases with children 8-10 years are presented with slides showing pictures from psychological diagnostics in sandboxes. In these three first families in the study who have been offered family therapy there are changes indicating improvements in the way the children played and acted during the assessment of Erica play method before and after family therapy sessions.

Summary

This study is in progress. The background of refugee children is discussed from what importance the children's experiences of actual war-situations and their social network has, in relation to their inner world, evaluated by a play method. Three first cases in the study are presented evaluating the play method before and after the family therapy sessions. In these psychological assessments there are signs showing that they have gone through traumatic experiences but it is not possible to pin down exactly from where the trauma originates. Other factors are influencing their inner world like parent support, network and living in a strange environment during the war situation. The assessments of three children participating in the study showed in the psychological test Erica play method changes indicating improvements in the way they played and acted before and after family therapy sessions.